DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 769 CS 502 158

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TITLE Formality in Rhetorical Delivery.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Theory of Rhetoric Conference (Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 5-6, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Participation; Body Language; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Interaction; *Nonverbal Communication; *Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric; Rhetorical Criticism; Role Perception
IDENTIFIERS *Formality

ABSTRACT

Formality in rhetorical delivery can be defined as a complex variable that represents the speaker's efforts to invoke sociocultural rules of audience control through the nonverbal components of the delivery. This document describes some of the aspects of formality, outlines its significance in rhetorical contexts, and evaluates the concept in terms of current conceptions of behavior and motivation. The model of formality contains these factors: physical distance from the audience, use of artificial forms of enhancing distance, attire, posture, gesture, movement, and certain elements of vocal behavior. Since rhetoric is concerned with effective communication and the factors over which a speaker exercises control, this model of formality can be useful in that it offers a coherent set of cues to elicit appropriate audience role behavior. (MAI)

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FORMALITY IN RHETORICAL DELIVERY

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Of the canons of classical rhetoric, none have experienced more dramatic shifts in fortune than those associated with delivery. Memory quickly dropped from the corpus of inherited doctrine, while elocution has had a stable career, and invention and disposition remained virtually unchallenged until the middle of the eighteenth century. In contrast, action and pronunciation have alternately suffered and benefited at the hands of fortune. In antiquity, delivery was regarded as the essential component of rhetorical effectiveness, and Cicero (1970: 255) approvingly quoted the Demosthenean quip that delivery is the first, second, and third most important component of rhetoric. Following the fall of Rome, rhetoric came to be seen as a theory of composition and found employment in such diverse applications as criticism and the theory of letter writting. As a consequence of this orientation, delivery was largely disregarded until the opening of the Enlightenment. Francis Bacon (1869: 238) marked the use of nonverbal signs in communication as one of the sciences most in need of further study. A host of theorists answered Bacon's call for the study of nonverbal elements in communication and, through a curious twisting of classical vocabulary, the resulting school came to be known as the elocutionary movement. Elocutionary theorists developed systematic classifications of physical and vocal manipulations available to a speaker,

and made extensive recommendations for the situations in which each technique might be used. The elocutionary movement so dominated the study of rhetoric that introductory speech students at Harvard during the first third of the nineteenth century were required to practice one hour a day in a specially designed bamboo sphere which marked the appropriate positions for each gesture.

Such excesses produced a readily anticipatable backlash, and the most formidable respondent was James A. Winans whose call for conv[illegible]tional quality served as a convenient rallying poi[illegible]or those who viewed the successes of great orators with suspicion. The plea for naturalness was well received and used to justify disregard for systematic manipulation of voice and gesture in rhetorical delivery. All that was necessary, or so it was claimed, was that a speaker avoid certain rudimentary or mechanical errors and nature would direct his use of vocal and physical apparatus. That this attitude continues to dominate instruction in rhetoric is evidenced by contemporary speaking texts devoting only the briefest of chapters to delivery and placing primary emphasis on the faults a speaker should avoid.

For the current low estimate of delivery, a number of factors may be cited. Obvious factors include the continuing reaction to excesses of the elocutionary theorists and the interest in rhetoric among those whose primary expertise is

in informal or written communication. However, I believe a potent source of disinterest in delivery is the failure of contemporary theorists to identify a governing concept around which isolated studies and variables may be ordered. In classical times, the governing concept was portraiture and a speaker's delivery was said to be adapted to the situation when it portrayed the emotions he felt. During the elocutionary era, speculation was governed by the theory of moral sympathy and the doctrine of natural signs. Both classical and elocutionary rationales functioned effectively because they served as focal points for otherwise diverse researches, and because they were closely associated with prevailing conceptions of human behavior and motivation.

The purpose of this essay is to argue that the concept of formality may serve a parallel role for contemporary speculation about the rhetorical effects of delivery. In what follows, I shall define formality, describe some of its constituents, outline its significance in rhetorical contexts, and conclude with some remarks on the utility of the concept in view of current conceptions of behavior and motivation.

DEFINITION

Satisfactory completion of a rhetorical encounter can occur only if the speaker and audience identify mutually satisfactory roles and adopt appropriate behaviors for the enactment of the specified roles. One important element of the role enactment is the amount of verbal interaction between the speaker and his audience, and between members of the audience while the speech is in progress. Failure to reach agreement on appropriate relationships and failure to enact demanded roles may result in premature termination of rhetorical encounters and it may produce situations in which all participants feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, a speaker may seem unnecessarily restrictive thereby producing situations in which the audience feels its efforts to discuss relevant issues and to secure necessary information have been improperly thwarted. In such a situation, the audience is likely to be restive and the speaker is likely to feel that his efforts to present a coherent discourse have been hampered by an unruly and dilatory mob. On the other hand, a speaker who is less restrictive than expected is likely to leave his audience searching for direction while the speaker is confused by the audience's apparent unwillingness to participate in an intended discussion.

Recognition that achieving mutually satisfactory levels of interaction is essential to rhetorical processes is almost commonplace. However, it remains to observe that the characteristic roles obtained in achieving such levels of interaction convey important implications for the audience's willingness to accept the speaker's message. That is, the degree to which an audience feels free to interact verbally is related to the degree to which they feel asked to make a decision rather than receive instructions or a report on a decision already rendered. In other words, the more interaction permitted, the more an audience feels free to discuss, debate, and modify or reject a proposal. The less interaction permitted, the more an audience feels compelled to accept the dictates of the speaker and the more final his pronouncements appear to be.

Although precise variations in tone presented by rhetorical situations are difficult to measure, I believe both the dominant factor and its extreme conditions are relatively easy to identify. For want of a better term, I call the dominant factor 'formality' and I define it to be a complex variable representing the sum of a speaker's efforts to invoke social-cultural rules of control through primarily nonverbal components of his delivery.[2] Although my focus is on efforts of the speaker, it is important to recognize that his efforts may go for naught if unperceived by the audience.

As a result, theorists examining rhetorical situations will do well to consider the speakers' efforts to exercise control, the perceptions of the audience, and the interaction between the two sets of data (Miller 1969: 52-61). Audience perceptions of speaker behavior and the formality of the situation are derived from the experiences in which they have been compelled to accept varying degrees of formality and associated submissive behavior.

Although unambiguous instances of extremely informal and extremely formal situations may never exist, socially defined models of them exist as sets of role expectations and demands mentally abstracted from the conditions of discourse we encounter in our daily exchanges with one another. Models of extreme informality are derived from the normal conditions of undirected conversation in which noone attempts to dominate, all participants feel free to contribute, and little effort is made to direct the reactions of other participants. While it may be difficult to conceive of this as a role model for behaviour in public speaking situations, this was probably the model chosen for New England Town Meetings and which controls the semi-mythical accounts of such meetings preserved in popular texts (Oliver 1965: 43-45). Such meetings, the ritual account runs, were the 'nursery of American Independence' because each town 'was a little and perfect republic' which brought together on equal footing

'the rich and the poor, the good and the bad, and gave character, eloquence, and natural leadership full and free play' (Curtis 1875: 867?).

The model case of extreme formality is represented by a number of situations with which most of us are familiar. For us, a particularly unflattering image is that of the aging professor reading forth laboriously composed lectures while a hushed class of students anxiously records every word. Less unpleasant if only because it takes place in another environment is the view of the stern and righteous preacher forecasting damnation and offering salvation to a silent and attentive congregation. In each of these instances, the audience members recognize that verbal interaction is improper, believe that the critical decisions have already been made, and assume that their role is one of receiving instructions.

In each of the extremes mentioned, the perceived degree of formality specifies appropriate conduct for both the speaker and the audience. In the informal models, the distinction between speaker and audience is blurred or nonexistent, all participants share equally in the burden of conversation, and none assume a dominant role. From this extreme, we can observe a progression or development over an infinite range of intermediate situations before reaching the models of extreme formality. At this end of the continuum,

the distinction between speaker and audience is rigidly maintained, audience members assume a subordinate role, and participants feel compelled to accept the dictates of the speaker.

In the role models explored above, there is relatively little ambiguity and most members or our culture can readily enact the appropriate roles. Even individuals who cannot verbalize the constituents of 'proper' behavior in these cases seem to have remarkably little difficulty in adapting to the situation. However, more common situations often pose some difficulty in determining the appropriate social roles. These situations offer a range of possible behaviors. and members of the audience must determine the appropriate role relationships. In resolving the problems of interpretation posed by such situations, members of the audience derive cues for the regulation of their behavior from the physical setting, other members of the audience, and from the conduct and appearance of the speaker.

CONSTITUENTS OF FORMALITY

I shall leave a careful mapping of the constituents of formality to others, but I want to suggest some of the factors a speaker may manipulate to influence audience

perceptions of formality. The most obvious factors include physical distance from the audience; use of artificial forms of enhancing distance; attire; posture, gesture, and movement; and certain elements of vocal behavior.

Distance

Of the constituents of formality, none has been explored more fully than physical space. For his pioneering work in this regard we are indebted to Edward Hall and his conclusions remain the classic formulation of proxemic effects. Although subsequent research has revealed subtle variations across cultures, the recognition that certain distances are reserved for particular forms of conversation remains virtually unchallenged. As physical space between communicants increases, volume increases and the conversation turns to matters of a less intimate nature. Most members of our culture feel comfortable addressing a group at a range of eight to twenty feet, but greater distances are permitted when addressing an individual of high status or in extremely formal settings.

Although Hall was primarily concerned with distances between participants in less formal interactions, and although subsequent researchers have followed his lead, there

appears to be no reason to deny the speaker an ability to manipulate distances and to secure conseguent advantages. From a speaker's point of view, one means of increasing the perceived formality of an occasion is to increase the distance between the speaker and the audience. Such variations in distance, Hall noted (1959: 160), 'give a tone to communication, accent it, and at times even override the spoken words.'

Artificial Distance

Although the precise limits remain unclear, there are some obvious constraints on a speaker's ability to increase the physical distance between himself and his audience. Among the more obvious constraints are the size of the room, the strength of the speaker's voice, and the distance at which an audience is willing to engage the speaker. As a means of overcoming these limitations, a speaker may call on a number of techniques of artifically increasing the space between himself and the audience. One of the most noticeable signs of created distance is use of the vertical dimension. We are accustomed to placing speakers on stages of varying elevation, but colonial architects made maximum use of vertical space by placing clergymen on podiums elevated well

over the heads of their congregations. For example, Anglican clergy in Kings Chapel, Boston stood on a podium fully ten feet high and those in the other churches of old Boston were almost equally well situatated.

Other artificial means of increasing distances between the speaker and his audience include railings such as those used in many modern churches, tables, and rostrums. These latter may have added value when endowed with emblems of power and authority. The availability of such devices may be beyond the control of a speaker, but when they are present the decision to use or disregard them always rests with the speaker. Effective use of such barriers is analogous to the use of physical positioning in other forms of interaction and the research generally supports my claim. Concluding a review of recent research on nonverbal communication, Harrison and Crouch (1975: 96) recognize that 'some spatial arrangements are quite informal and facilitate a free exchange among participants, while other arrangements are quite formal and foster a speaker-audience relationship.'

Attire

Another constituent of formality is the attire of the speaker. Studies of nonverbal communication tend to compress

remarks about clothing under the title 'artifact codes,' thereby lumping together a number of factors not all of which are related to perceived formality (for example, Leathers 1976: 84-115). While lacking a formal vocabulary and employing haphazard research methods, popular literature on clothing offers some interesting commentaries on our condition. Of the popular authors, John T. Molloy has had most success and his materials are sufficiently well documented to be worth paraphrasing. Molloy's thesis is that clothing colors and styles provide a graded scale corresponding to the socio-economic status of its wearer, and that most members of our society recognize the principal gradients. Aside from deliberate rebels, most people assign more prestige to those appropriately dressed and are more likely to obey orders given by such individuals. The incidents cited lend substantial credence to Molloy's thesis, and the following example clearly indicates the rhetorical effectiveness of proper attire. Under controlled conditions, an associate of Molloy's was introduced to secretaries in several firms as a new managerial assistant. Each secretary was instructed to show the young man around and the young man began making a series of requests for assistance at the conclusion of each tour. A total of 100 trials were conducted with the associate wearing lower middle class attire in 50 and upper middle class garb in the remaining

trials. In lower middle class attire he received positive responses only four times while he received positive respones 30 times when dressed to indicate higher status (Molloy 1975: 26).

Posture, Gesture, & Movement

Classical rhetoricians and Enlightenment elocutionists attempted to identify particular meanings associated with isolated postures and gestues. The descriptions recorded by Quintilian (1920) and the drawings employed by Austin (1966) and Bulwer (1974) remain intriguing examples of this endeavour. However, contemporary efforts to identify kinemic units of meaning corresponding to the phonemic components of spoken language have been less successful. At best, gestures appear to function as reinforcers or substitutes for verbal signs. However, with regard to audience perceptions of formality, the absolute frequency of gesture appears to be more important than the specific gestures employed, and the erectness of a speaker's postures seems to be a more reliable guide than particular movements and variations. While not focused solely on the attributes of interest here, Bettinghaus (1973: 114-115) examined the effects of some speaker mannerisms on the reactions of the audience.

Speakers asked to 'behave improperly' were instructed to lean on the podium, dress carelessly, and behave as if they had little regard for the audience. Speakers behaving properly were instructed to avoid these faults and 'make the best appearance they could.' Although the content of the speeches was identical and other aspects of the situation were controlled, speakers behaving properly achieved significantly greater attitude change than others. This example as well as other studies with which I am familiar deal with situations in which speakers are thought to have violated the expections of the audience. Whether or not those expectations may be systematically shaped by the speaker remains to be examined. However, Desmond Morris' (1977: 272) conclusion that 'general body-posture, or "bearing", is one of the most widespread and common of all human Metasignals' suggests that use of posture and motion to regulate perceived formality may be a fruitful area for further investigation.

Vocal Behavior

The final factor which appears related to audience perceptions of formality is the vocal behavior of a speaker. Vocal characteristics such as volume, rate, and pitch have long been objects of interest to rhetoricians. Aristotle

(1954: 165), for example, limits his brief discussion of delivery to 'the right management of the voice to express [portray] the various emotions.' Modern explorations of language use have gone somewhat further afield and have demonstrated the existence of an interesting pattern of code switching. This phenomenon is most pronounced in bilingual societies where one language is used for casual exchanges and another for more formal encounters. However, equally significant forms of code switching may be observed within primarily monolingual societies such as the United States.

Within a monolingual community, code switches arise from the more or less systematic choices an individual makes in using elements of his linguistic repertory. Most obvious selections involve matters of pronounciation and the degree of grammatical precision employed in forming expressions. Specific patterns of code switching appear bound to social classes and influenced by the cultural background of individual speakers, but some general conclusions appear to hold across classes and across cultures (Giles and Powesland 1975). The conclusions of greatest interest in the present context follow: (i) linguistically competent members of a community recognize or distinguish several different codes; (ii) such community members are able themselves to use several of the codes reognized; (iii) native speakers feel quite confident in selecting the codes appropriate to

different situations; and (iv) there are normative and behavioral expectations associated with the selection of appropriate codes.

From the rhetorician's point of view, the codes mutually available to speaker and audience can be arranged on a continuum from casual to careful (Labov 1972: 70-109). The more care a speaker takes in forming his utterance and the more closely his expression matches standards of correct usage, the more formal his behavior will appear to be.

RHETORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Studies examining the effects of speech delivery are legion and generally support the conclusion that effective delivery enhances both the audience's evaluation of the speaker and receptivity to the speaker's message (Pearce and Conklin 1971: 235-237; Addington 1971: 242-243; and Gunderson and Hooper 1976: 158-159). Unfortunately, such studies often fail to distinguish effects of various performance codes available to a speaker and generally disregard mediatory variables associated with audience perceptions of the setting. That is, these studies typically focus on what I believe to be secondary or derived relationships between the speaker's conduct and the reactions

of the audience thereby failing to recognize the effects of perceived formality, contextual signs of formality, and input from other members of the audience.

If my suppositions regarding the role of formality in rhetorical delivery are correct, primary relationships include the correspondence between particular speaker behaviors and audience perceptions of formality, between audience perceptions of formality and interaction levels, and between audience perceptions of formality and pressures to accept the speaker's message. Such a pattern is significant departure from current conceptions of rhetorical effect because most studies have examined secondary, or derived, relationships between speaker conduct and audience persuasability and have disregarded conditioning factors including clues to the degree of formality derived from the context and from other members of the audience. The posited relationships are presented in figure I.

[Insert Figure I]

Traditionally, rhetoric has been concerned with the factors over which a speaker may exercise control in his efforts to achieve maximum effectiveness. With such a focus, factors presented by the situation and by members of the

audience may be viewed as constraints which limit the ability of a speaker to exercise jurisdiction over the degree of formality perceived by his audience.

In the preceding section of this essay, I've described what I take to be the more important constituents of formality. Among the interesting questions arising from my formulation are several which center on situations in which a speaker fails to provide his audience with a coherent set of cues to appropriate role behavior. One type of incoherence results when isolated speaker behaviors are inconsistent with one another, and a second type of incoherence occurs when the behavior of a speaker, taken as a unit, is inconsistent with cues derived from the situation or other members of the audience. In cases of the first type, I suspect a speaker forfeits his ability to control the reactions of his audience as they turn to other guides in selecting appropriate role relationships. In cases of the second type, I suspect audience resolution of incongruity develops along more complex lines such as those described by Sarbin and Allen (1968: 541-544). However, either resolution appears to reduce a speaker's chances of success.

CONCLUSION

The need for empirical investigation of the relations I allege is obvious. Also, it may be profitable to examine the delivery of famous speakers with an eye toward their efforts to manipulate audience reactions. However, the conceptual adequacy of my formulation may be evaluated by comparing it to the precedents I cited earlier. The critical features of the concepts employed when delivery flourished are that (i) they permitted the integration of findings from diverse areas of inquiry, and (ii) they were consistent with prevailing theories of human conduct. I believe the diversity of related findings is indicated by the diversity of literature cited at opportune points in my development. Moreover, I have stated my case throughout to indicate the consistency of my position with contemporary notions concerning social roles. As a peroration, if you will, I shall offer a few remarks pointing to the convergence of my views with the views of those who see human behavior as a rule-governed activity.

The social roles and role relationships upon which I have commented exist as complex sets of rules which both define the meaning of particular communicative episodes (Frentz and Farrell 1976) and which constitute the conditions necessary for interaction (Nofsinger 1975). Although most

research has focused upon the former function, it is the later function with which I am most concerned. If rules establish the conditions in which interaction takes place, it appears likely that variations in the rules applicable to a situation will produce variations in the outcome of the interaction. Such a postulate is consistent with the recognition that fully stated rules have two components: specification of the situations to which they apply and enumeration of the appropriate behaviors in the specified situations (Cushman and Whiting 1972: 227-231 & 233). Moreover, it appears probable that rules should be considered not as isolated units, but rather as elements of elaborately manufactured hierarchial structures which variously apply to relatively few specialized situations or to the bulk of situations an individual may encounter. If so, the rule structures must include definitions of switching clues which permit the selective application of rules to emergent situations (Pearce 1973: 165-167). In discussing the cues a speaker may employ to signal his audience that particular roles are to be enacted, we have been discussing one set of clues which serve the switching function. Research on delivery should continue as an effort to identify the relevant rules and catalogue the clues which signal an audience that a particular set of rules is in force.

Finally, application of the rules perspective to rhetorical delivery has the advantage of making the study of delivery a logical consequence of examining other forms of social interaction. However, one caution should be sounded. Rule structures and components are applicable to only the population which supports their use. Purely idiosyncratic rules--those supported by a single individual--and rules established in long standing interpersonal relationships are of little interest to the rhetor. Simply stated, such rules lack support of a rhetorically attractive target audience. However, rules supported by substantial populations offer keys to the manipulation of audiences of sufficient size to call forth rhetorical endeavours.

NOTES

[1]Professor Ray Dearin, Ms. Diane Gorcyca, and Mr. John Griffith have reviewed earlier drafts of this essay. I am indebted to them for many valuable suggestions.

[2]In popular usage, 'formality' implies control or regulation. Thus, a formal invitation demands a reply, a formal situation is one in which you must mind your manners, and formality is to be avoided when you want to put friends at ease. My use of the term is derived from these primative expressions, but emphasizes a continuum from casual to formal while concentrating on one set of factors regulating audience perceptions of a situation.

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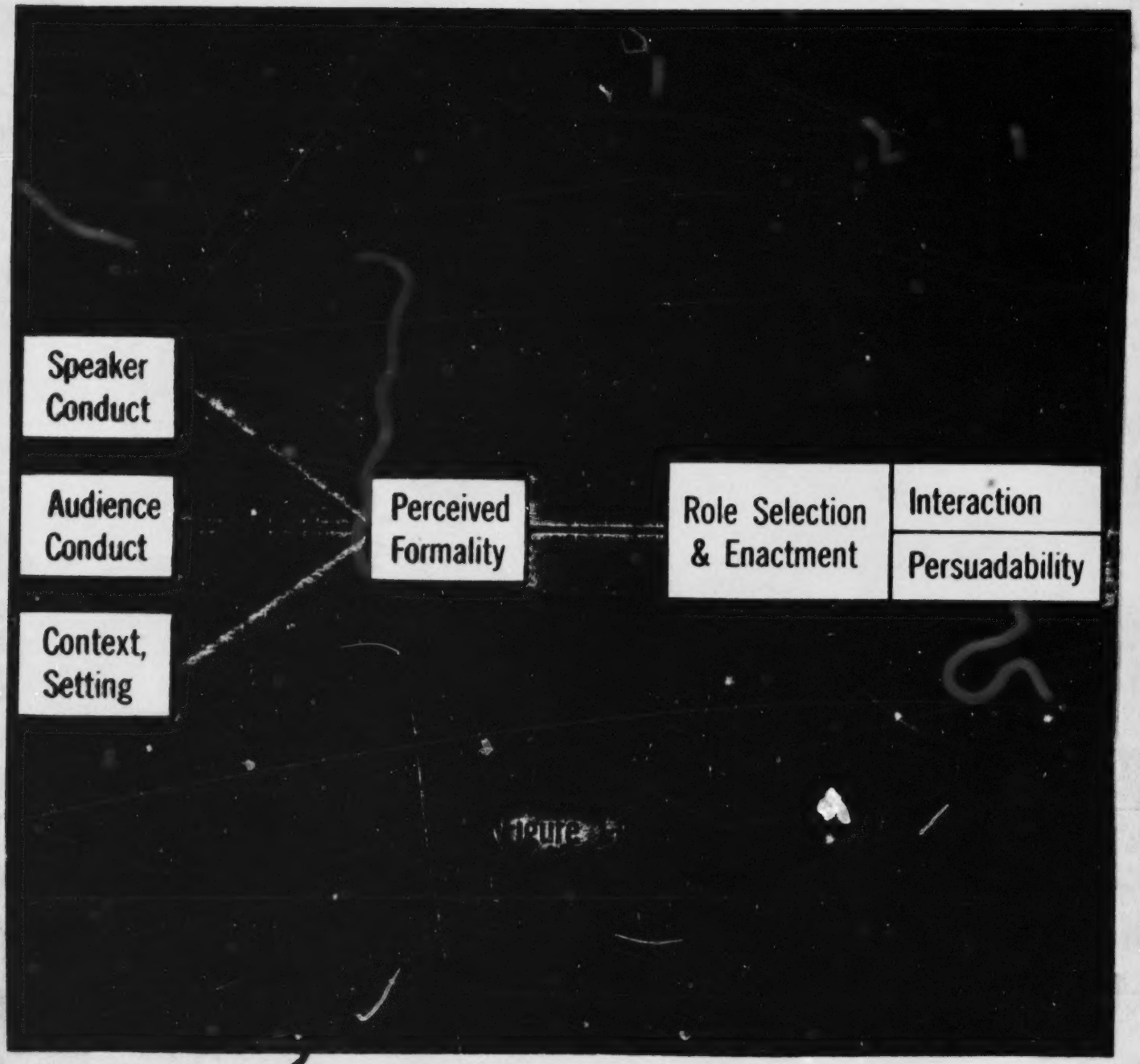
Speaker Conduct
Audience Conduct
Context, Setting
Perceived Formality
Role Selection & Enactment
Interaction
Persuadability